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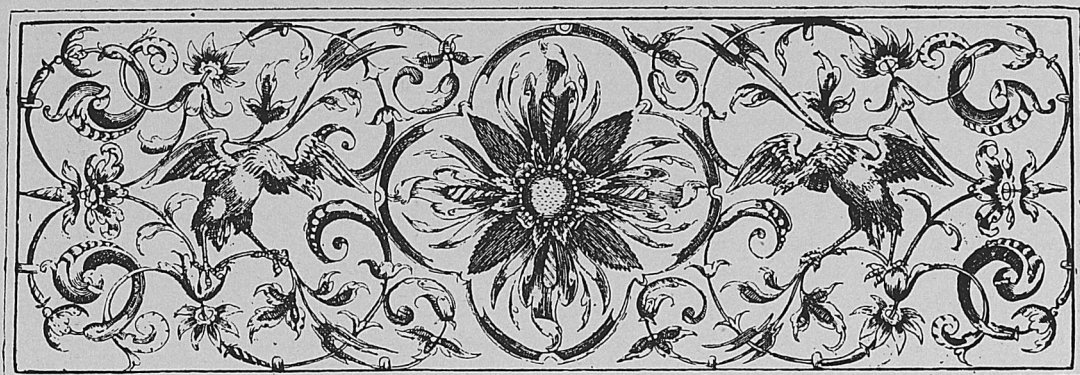
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ARCHITECTURA ARTIUM MATER.



IN the United States the fine arts are most vulnerable in that member of them which may be called with truth the mother of the arts. Architecture deserves the honor of the term because the house comes before everything else that can be called art during man's development on earth, whether the home be a cave or a palace, wigwam or mansion, conjuring booth or cathedral. Nor merely is the house the first term of structures more or less immovably fixed to the soil, for it can be proved to antedate and in all probability to have suggested such widely differing things as the tomb, the boat, the chair and the enclosed carriage. Certain epithets used by the old Scandinavian poets were less far-fetched than we are prone to think when they spoke in metaphor of the house as a "hearth-ship" or "ingle-keel." But while on this side there has been stagnation in America, if not positive decline, there has been remarkable activity in other directions. The arts of sculpture, painting and engraving, together with a host that may be classed under the handy word decorative, have risen here in the present generation with a rapidity that would suggest a doubt of their chance to last, were it not obvious enough from history that at certain epochs the growth of art is as sudden as the coming of spring in the Arctic. It is architecture that lags, and for that reason it is a question whether American art rests on a sound foundation. There is at least room for suspicion that the backward process which may be detected in the unfolding of our art, namely, from easel paintings and statues to decorative work, and thence finally to architecture, is neither normal nor health-

ful. In the past the house developed into the temple and church, the town hall and country manse; it was only then that the younger arts came like sisters to the hearth and taught prim Hestia how to be beautiful as well as good. Or, looking only at the present, there is the experience of the householder in ordinary; he is forced to proceed by the common path, build the house first, and then, if his money hold out, take up the embellishment of walls, floors and ceilings as an afterthought. Does it not stand to reason that the best results will flow from an evolution of the arts in harmonious order? and is it not fair to suppose that a reversal of that order, if it does not ruin a nation's art, will at least produce two evils—waste of energy and delay of development?

It is true that easel paintings, water colors, etchings and engravings give animation to bare walls and rescue many interiors from hideousness, but it is also a fact that the very plenty and excellence of such things tend to divert the attention and relieve the mind of a much more pressing, a much more radical necessity, that of making the house itself a thing of beauty to start with. To put it harshly, all these decorative and superdecorative articles are but gilding to hide the wretchedness underneath. They glitter so that one forgets how ugly the lines of the underlying material are; they woo the mind from deeper things by making surfaces acceptable to the senses. That is not a blame to them but a compliment, since they accomplish thereby the object for which they were made, but their excellence marks a limit beyond which further advance seems impossible, for they serve to confuse one by appearing to represent the highest expression in art, when they form but one side, and that perhaps the less im-

portant, certainly the last to be thought of. There is an instructive comparison to be drawn between the Parthenon at Athens and the Baths of Caracalla at Rome, the one still beautiful however disrupted, the other ugly from the moment the marvels of decoration were stripped from its vast walls of coarse material. Painting, sculpture and such arts tend also to extremes which have little or no connection with the general purpose of art; they enter false channels remote from beauty or usefulness, and in so doing harm themselves, gradually falling into contempt. Moreover, they exert on architecture a reflex action that is very far from wholesome. There was a time when houses were built for the convenience of the dwellers therein. If a window was needed the wall was pierced; small difference whether it was half a foot one way or the other, provided it did its work. Nevertheless the old, irregular houses are far more beautiful than those made exact by rule, compass and plumb-line, with windows and doors at even distances, and everything symmetrical to a hair. Nowadays the outside of a house is the main care of the architect. If he be clever with pencil and India ink he draws a picture of the future house, too often an ideal without relation to the comfortable management of chimneys, rooms, windows and doors, and when he comes to construct he adheres as well as he can to the sketch. Does not this evil in domestic architecture, well known and often deplored, spring from defective, because partial, education of architects and their patrons, fed almost exclusively as they are on easel-paintings and the other mobile forms of art? Is it not one reason for the contemptible state of architecture in pretty much every country to-day, but more particularly in the United States?

There is every reason to await in America a very great development of the fine arts, provided shadow is not taken for substance, surface for solidity. The elements which in the past and in other lands evolved what are loosely enough, and perhaps confusingly, called schools, exist here to-day. Italians and Flemings became great in the fine arts when laymen emancipated themselves from the artistic dogmas of the church and became independent enough to dictate to churchmen instead of doing exactly what the latter bade. The great cathedrals of Northern France and Flanders were built and decorated by masons and sculptors who had freed their handiwork, if not themselves, from the dictation of ecclesiastics, and the same movement can be detected in the early annals of the Italian renaissance. The greatest blossoming of Italian art occurred when that land was more like a republic than it became later, the small governments, many of them republican in form as well as spirit, forming a whole not unlike the States of a federation. The

Netherlands, too, had their outburst of art, together with, or shortly after, the struggle for independence, when they set that example which we so wisely followed in the last century when we assumed a government by the people, for the people. But in these cases the numbing force of lay tyranny or ecclesiasticism descended upon Europe before the fine arts could penetrate the masses and work itself out healthfully in all departments. Patronage was confined to courts and art became sterilized by the usual misapplication of encouragement; gradually even the stimulus given by guilds and corporations was withdrawn. Hence we find Holland, as well as Italy, arrested in their development so far as the fine arts are concerned, and at an early period see evidences in Flanders and Southern Germany as well, that an outburst of the painters' art was followed quickly by a decline. Now the Netherlands, in all probability, are the most instructive states of Europe for Americans to study as to their arts and as to their politics, owing to the close similarity between our aspirations and theirs, to say nothing of descent and of other direct relationships too many to mention here. The arts flourished magnificently in Holland, for example, about the time North America was colonized, but they bloomed only partially. Architecture never equalled painting, nor, indeed, did sculpture reach the level of its sister. Is not this one cause for the extraordinary dying out in Holland of a race of artists who were and still are the wonder of the world? Is it not fair to suppose that with a continuance of liberty and a wise attention to architecture the Netherlands would have become eminent in that line also?

The United States, emancipated from the narrow dogmas of religion, and safe for a long while to come from the grossest kind of tyranny on the part of rulers, ought to be the most favorable ground for working out the possibilities of every branch of the arts. Hitherto, however, the fine arts have had an exotic character with us. They resemble other forms of education taken bodily from Europe without intelligent reflection on the needs of the new age and the new land; forms of education which have outgrown usefulness if they ever had a use, and yet are applied blindly to altered conditions and modern times. If an example is necessary, consider the practice of our colleges in encouraging the parrot system of learning without appeals to the live brains, the vivid interest, of boys. Consider how the least experienced teachers are allotted to Freshmen when it ought to be the most skilled who shall train the youngest and most impressionable minds. So in art we take second-rate ideas from Europe instead of thinking the matter out for ourselves and proceeding from lower to higher by gradual steps. Statuary and pictures need to be re-

garded in their old place as adjuncts of architecture before our artists can reach the highest mark in painting and sculpture. The industrial arts must ripen and broaden the general taste, and the workman who shall be able to rise to the highest point must be educated in the school of necessity and hard work. We have borrowed from Europe results, not principles; we imitate masters before we have been pupils long enough; we have constantly been attempting short cuts in the fine arts as in other education, and hence fail of the best effects. There is a homely proverb about putting the cart before the horse. That seems to be the radical evil in our art. It has not prevented a very remarkable development of able workers, among whom are some of startling originality, more especially in painting; but the result appears to be that the limits of each branch have been quickly reached and further advance estopped. As it is, artists are not sufficiently one with the people; they do not know how to be popular in the best sense without appealing to trivial, transient or vulgar sentiments; they are wanting in simplicity and faith in themselves. If they complain of lack of patronage the charge is only true of individuals, for as a class they have received great encouragement, only it is not given in the most intelligent fashion, and therefore fails of the rightful effect.

The remedy for this state of affairs lies at the door of the people if they will intelligently regard and grasp it. They must first encourage the lower forms of art, the industrial rather than the decorative, but insist on beauty wherever that is possible. They should seek to form large bodies of superior artisans, out of whom the artist may spring in time, bodies having some analogy with the corporations of St. Luke, founded in Ghent in 1338, in Bruges a little later, and in Paris and Florence during the same epoch. Out of these guilds of freemen, notwithstanding many foolish by-laws which hampered the growth of talent, arose the greatest schools of painting with which the world is acquainted, for it seems necessary that a large amount of political independ-

ence shall go hand in hand with a complete system of self government among the artists. In modern times the art-guild of Paris has approached nearest to these conditions, and it is significant that it also stands first as a body among the artists of all nations emulous of rank in the fine arts. When buildings are to be erected, whether public or private, the people must bring the forces of sympathy and criticism to bear on those who control the design, and the same when monuments, quays, blocks of houses are to be designed or parks to be laid out. They may fairly demand that structures which will remain before their eyes and the eyes of their children shall be as beautiful as possible, and they may visit commissioners, architects and house owners who offend, with such penalties of neglect or active criticism as befit the case. As to public buildings more particularly, the people and the press should move heaven and earth to escape the disgrace that befalls a commonwealth when incompetent, uninspired architects are allowed to worse than squander the taxpayers' millions. Mural decoration and the resources of sculpture in legitimate relation to architecture should accompany and follow the renaissance of a neglected mother art. Architects should be encouraged to independence by a noble confidence reposed in them whenever they have shown themselves masters in their branch. Only in this way can we hope that master builders will give without stint to our architecture their very best thought and striving. It will be the cause of their own glory, that of their patrons and of the country at large. When we have a body of architects composed of chosen men of talent, who respect themselves too much to do poor and ugly work, it will be time to feel assured of the future of the fine arts. The time will have arrived, when a householder who wishes to sell a house designed by a great master obtains a mighty price beyond the cost of building, beyond the bricks and mortar, beyond finishings and decorations—that price being a measure of the extra value men place upon the structure because it is a work of art.

Charles de Kay

